



TOWN NEWSLETTER

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BRINGING BACK PUBLIC EDUCATION TO THE HILLS

The start of another school year is a good time to update the Town on progress in the effort to bring back Public Education to Los Altos Hills. Although this marks the third school year since the sad closure of Bullis-Purissima Elementary by the LASD (Los Altos School District), there are many promising developments to report. The City Council is dedicated to making this year one of positive initiatives in this area, all focused on the goal of restoring a valuable community asset: a neighborhood public school.

First, a bit of history. A little over two and one-half years ago, despite the passage of a substantial parcel tax increase just a few weeks prior, the LASD began a process which ultimately resulted in the closure of the last public school in our community. Initially, the goal of the District was to consolidate students to save administrative costs; generate extra income by renting the site to a private school and to save the substantial capital costs of upgrading the campus. In the end, these cost savings were never realized. In retrospect, it is fair to say that everyone, including the original architects of this plan regret this ill-conceived decision to close Bullis. However, community leaders are still left with the task of dealing with the consequences. On the City Council, we have consistently reached the conclusion that doing nothing is not an acceptable alternative.

At this point, the issue is not if there is going to be Charter School, but where it will eventually find a home. The school has a great principal, has completed an extremely successful first year and has raised over \$5 million dollars toward a permanent campus. Even the new LASD Superintendent, Tim Justis freely admits, "The Bullis Charter School is here to stay." For a number of reasons, the Town Council thinks this home should be within the boundaries of Los Altos Hills:

- The Town has seen all four of its public schools closed and neither the LASD or PAUSD (school districts) have any plans to reopen a school in the Hills
- Los Altos Hills is the only city on the Peninsula without its own school
- A neighborhood school helps build community
- The Charter School is the only way to bring back public education to the Hills within a reasonable time frame

The City Council thinks that a local public school can be a valuable community asset to Los Altos Hills. That is why we have played an important supporting role in the Bullis Charter School effort, just as in other significant community initiatives. Each of us has taken the time to study the issue. Ultimately, we all came to the same conclusion: this issue is critically important to our Town and is a responsibility that we cannot walk away from. Here are some of the reasons why:

- General Plan calls for the Council to be involved with land use, roads and public education as issues of primary importance for the citizens of the Hills
- The City Council is the only local political body responsive enough to the needs of our community to take on this issue.
- The Charter School has achieved critical mass and offers a huge return to the community on any time and money invested.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a neighborhood school is an important factor affecting property values. Recently, the following figures were presented to the City Council outlining the relative rise in home values along the Peninsula. They suggest a strong correlation between property values and the presence of a neighborhood school:

Statistics on 2002-04 change in median property values (since Bullis closure):

Palo Alto: +23.8%	Portola Valley: +19.3%
Atherton: +30.4%	Woodside: +11.2%
Los Altos: +16.5%	Los Altos Hills: -0.3%

* Figures are derived from Silicon Valley Association of Realtors, as reported in Palo Alto Weekly, Spring 2005 "Real Estate Special" section. They represent the compounded annual change in real estate prices from 2002 to 2004.

The Council recognizes that many Town residents are still learning about this issue. We have done our best to educate and solicit input (including holding educational forums and surveying the residents twice over the last two years). However, some facts bear repeating:

- A Charter School is a public school that functions under the auspices of the Santa Clara County School Board.
- It is open to all residents of California, receives public money to finance its operations and cannot charge tuition.
- Charter school is about choice, no one can be required to attend the Charter, you must apply for admission.
- If you are happy with your present school, then you may continue to attend that school.
- Presently the School is chartered under LASD and residents who live in the LASD area have enrollment priority.
- Bullis Charter School is working on several ways to resolve this issue so that PAUSD residents may enjoy equal enrollment preferences.
- The educational experience offered by the Bullis Charter School is extremely popular with students and parents, with more than 100 students on a waiting list, despite expanded enrollment.

Over the next few months, the Council hopes that permanent arrangements can be made for the Bullis Charter School. We fully expect that a home can be found in the Hills for them to grow and prosper, as they become an important part of our community fabric. If this can be accomplished, everyone living in Town will benefit from higher property values, from a greater sense of community and from additional educational choices for our children. That is why we think Town government should continue to be involved in a supportive role. We look forward to hearing from you about this important issue.

— Mayor and City Council